

## Road Trip!

My wife and I decided a couple of days off and a road trip in the Mini to the Stars of Sandstone would be a good idea. The Mini was running really great after a carb overhaul and more suitable needle, so no worries there. You don't realize how little packing space is available until you try and use it!

Left Sunday late morning heading for Ficksburg 351km down the road. I had never actually checked the fuel consumption so it was quite a pleasant surprise to get 6.2l/100km travelling at about 110km/h true speed over the first 200km. 110km/h is just on the 649 cam @ about 4000 rpm. More feels like you're thrashing it and the noise becomes a bit much. It's cool to be cruising down the highway when most other cars are indicating 120 or more, and occasionally giving it a burst to pass; raised quite a few thumbs and got lots of smiles! It was really hot out, but the temp stayed good at about 83-87deg.

However, as with all good things, they tend not too last...

We decided to have a break about 30km outside Bethlehem and it just wouldn't start again. The battery was weak, so I rolled it a little and it fired up only to die again after about a 100m. Did this twice. While poking about under the hood a dude stopped and offered a tow to Bethlehem. I thought it was the fuel pump as I couldn't hear the clatter anymore, so not much else to do. He was from Eskom and pulled us (with my packed tow sling) to his connection who do a lot of their vehicles.

Now it becomes quite amazing. The garage owner was there in under 10min, Sunday afternoon. We cranked it but was weak and no pump noise. No problem the local Midas dude was phoned to open up (try that in Joburg) and a new Facet pump was in and clattering away within 40min, cranked but still no start. It was getting late and I didn't want to drive the pothole ridden roads in the dark so the wife started making plans to stay over. No problem for AJ 'take my bakkie and go stay where you booked, we'll sort it tomorrow' Put the weak battery on charge for the night.

Monday after a 250km round trip in a courtesy bakkie started tracing the lack of spark. The battery took a charge and showed 12.6V, but would drop to 7.6V every time I cranked it. Same when putting a piggy back battery. Then it would be back to 12.6V, so suspected a short. There was a constant current drain of about 250mA. Checked wiring for hours – no luck. Suspected the starter motor, as the drop was when cranking. Took the starter to the auto electrician who put new brushes and checked it to be ok. Still no spark and a voltage drop on cranking.

Because the Accuspark unit needs good voltage to work, got a new Midas battery. No voltage drop anymore on cranking. There was still no spark from the coil wire, so changed the coil. Still no luck. Measured all the HT leads – all ok. The new suspect was the Accuspark electronic points as I didn't pack points as I didn't believe the risk of the electronic unit failure was high. (Hmmm) Believe me, there are no Mini points in the Eastern Free State, anywhere, so my son brought my spare set from the garage, complete with HT leads, dizzy cap, rotor and whatever else he could find. Put the points in around 9pm and fired up first time, but then found dash light won't go out and confirmed with the multimeter - battery not charging.

Tuesday after another 250km round trip (own bakkie this time) started at around 9am with a replacement voltage regulator – still not charging. Got an alternator from Midas (I was now on first name terms already) only to find the fanbelt was now too long for the available adjustment. Another 2km round trip walking in the hot sun as the garage guys were all out making a living.

All assembled again – no problem starting but still no charging. Swopped out the previously bought regulator onto the new alternator; still no joy. Totally shattered at this stage and out of ideas drove round to the auto electrician.

After Karel plenty poking and prodding, measuring and head shaking, muttering and swearing, I took it out again and put it on their test bench. Dud alternator! New one appears from Midas. The second alternator comes in the same box but with a plastic bag, strapped to a cardboard tray. Also has a thread spring in the steady mount which I took out to get the bolt in. First supplied one didn't have these, so clearly the first unit had been returned before – Bastards.

The second one is also slightly different and doesn't fit, so we run it on the test rig and I machine down the plastic fan bit with a file to clear the mount bolt. Install again. Whoohoo all good! Just for completeness put the original alternator on the test bench and confirmed it was not working (OCD)

You will appreciate if you have a Mini that swopping your starter, installing and removing the battery zillions, and then alternator, 3 times, can take its toll on your back and knees and general demeanor in 27deg ambient.

Eventually leave Bethlehem around 3pm and get to Fickburg no problem. Spent Wednesday at Stars of Sandstone. Absolutely awesome experience – worth all the effort getting there!

No issues getting home. Power was down and fuel consumption at 8.3 l/100km, so clearly there is a case for electronic points. Of course the replacement mechanical ones might not have been 100% set up, but I'll go back to electronic (with mechanical in the boot).

**To summarize:**

When you take a road trip in your Mini be prepared for more than you bargained for, it could take two days longer!

I believe the alternator was the root cause. Voltage dropped so low on the battery that a cell died, but only under load. Battery voltage dropped too low to enable the electronic points to work, hence no initial restart. They are also apparently susceptible to high heat which might have happened due to the heat soak when stopping for the break.

There are genuinely good people left in the world who will go the extra mile and 2 more to help you.

Sandstone is an event not to be missed in 2019